

GOVERNMENT OF INDIA.

DECENTRALIZATION COMMITTEE

FOR THE

ROYAL COMMISSION

ON

DECENTRALIZATION.

NOTE ON FAMINE RELIEF

(WITH SUGGESTIONS)

BY

सत्यमेव जयते

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FAMINE RELIEF.

PART I.

Origin and history of the Famine Codes.

- (1) Resolution No. 44, dated 9th June 1883. Progs., June 1883, Nos. 31-52.
- (2) Resolution No. 35, dated 24th August 1893. Progs., September 1893, Nos. 4-5.
- (3) Resolution No. 20, dated 12th May 1897. Progs., May 1897, Nos. 152-160.
- (4) Resolution No. 31, dated 25th October 1897. Progs., October 1897, Nos. 58-60.
- (5) Resolution No. 35, dated 23rd December 1897. Progs., February 1898, Nos. 1-39.
- (6) Circular No. 1, dated 6th January 1899. Progs., January 1899, Nos. 9-22.
- (7) Resolution No. 11, dated 20th December 1900. Progs., December 1900, Nos. 44-46.
- (8) Resolution No. 12, dated 26th August 1901. Progs., September 1901, Nos. 17-23.
- (9) Resolution No. 7, dated 21st March 1903. Progs., May 1903, Nos. 1-6.

Main principles of Famine Relief.

The first attempt at codification into general rules of the principles evolved and the experience gained in the various attempts of Government to relieve sufferings caused by drought, followed upon the fruitful recommendations of the Commission appointed to enquire into the great famine of 1876-78 in Southern India. A rough draft code was circulated for the opinions of Local Governments in 1880, and a completed model in 1883, upon the basis of which separate codes were prepared for each Province. During the ten following years there was scarcity in several Provinces and actual famine in one district, which led to numerous important alterations in the codes, and a general revision was undertaken in 1893. This had barely been completed when the wide-spread famine of 1896-97 fell upon the country and put the new codes to a searching test. They stood the trial with fair success, but various departures were made from their precepts, and the Supreme Government found it necessary to depute an officer to inspect and report on the management of relief works. On receipt of his report they reviewed the principal issues involved, and asked Local Governments to formulate the amendments of their codes rendered necessary by recent experience; but the appointment of a second Famine Commission in 1898, caused action to be suspended. While the recommendations of this Commission were under consideration, the experiences of the general drought of 1895-1900 raised further issues, and resulted in a third Commission of enquiry and a further revision of the codes. The codes as they now stand thus embody the outcome of three successive Famine Commissions and thirty years of experience, during which the State has been called upon to deal with three great famines, besides several lesser calamities.

2. Throughout this period the cardinal principles of famine relief have not materially altered, although their practical application has undergone much discussion and many modifications. They may be stated as follows :—

- (1) The State cannot undertake to interfere in every isolated and individual case of distress. What will justify the application of the general resources of the State to the relief of want and suffering, is the occurrence of a natural

calamity affecting a material portion of the population of any locality.

- (2) Relief should be confined, as far as possible, to persons who have come to the end of their resources; labour commensurate with the labourer's powers should be exacted from all applicants for relief; and the grant of alms or gratuitous relief should be restricted to those who are physically incapable of labour.

- (3) Wages and doles should not exceed what is necessary to maintain life and health; and the wage should be proportionate to the work done;—no wage being given when no work is performed, save in the case of the physically weak.

3. In their practical application these fundamental principles are supplemented and hedged in with various qualifications and safeguards, designed to meet the peculiarities of the different classes of the population and secure elasticity in the working of the codes.

4. The Provincial famine codes have all been framed on the model of a revised code prepared by the President of the Famine Commission of 1901 and are very uniform in their main features. They provide, firstly, for a system of intelligence or reporting, which keeps the responsible authorities, from the District Officer to the Government of India, acquainted with the current condition and prospects of the crops, and supplies the first warnings of agricultural failure. In this system the Agricultural and Land Record departments fill a prominent place. Secondly, for a condition of preparedness, including a programme of useful works on which famine labour can be employed. Thirdly, for preliminary measures when distress seems imminent, such as suspensions of the revenue demand, the distribution of loans, the formation of relief circles, the opening of test relief-works. Fourthly, for the organization and payment of relief labour, the grant of gratuitous relief, and the final measures necessary, on the return of normal conditions, to assist and induce the people to resume their ordinary occupations.

Matters provided for in the Codes.

5. During the progress of relief operations, the rules allow of a considerable relaxation of the usual restrictions, financial and administrative, on the action of local authorities; and in order to reduce

Famine Accounts.

Circular No. 24—105, dated 22nd August 1907.

Functions of Local Governments and control by Government of India.

the burden of correspondence which relief measures involve, it has lately been proposed to Local Governments that, subject to guidance and inspection by the regular auditing staff, the accounts of famine charges should be finally passed by the District Officer, who is the authority immediately responsible for preventing wasteful expenditure and fraud.

6. The authority for setting the provisions of the famine code in operation, when the occasion arises, is the Local Government, with which, also, rests the general direction of all relief measures, unless it decides to appoint, and delegate some of its powers to, a special Famine Commissioner. The supervision of the Government of India is exercised through prescribed reports. These consist of an abstract of the lists of relief-works, showing the period and number of persons for whom the works will afford employment; a preliminary report when famine is impending, showing the area and population affected, the measures taken or proposed to be taken, and a forecast of the probable expenditure; a weekly telegraphic report while distress prevails, giving the number of persons in receipt of relief, with information as to their condition; and a more detailed monthly report. Since the last revision of the codes, interference with the administration of famine relief by Local Governments has been of rare occurrence, and has only been resorted to when a departure from settled principles and practice has been noticed, or the reports and statistics of relief have indicated any points requiring explanation or enquiry.

PART II.

Suggestion for decentralization.

7. But while the details of famine relief administration have been left entirely to Local Governments, they are bound to adhere strictly to the provision of the codes approved by the Government of India, and any alterations of the codes require, not by express rule, but by reason of their having received the Government of India's sanction, the approval of that authority. The codes embody a great mass of detailed instructions which do not affect the principles of famine relief and which Local Governments might, it is thought, be permitted to alter at their discretion. If necessary the permission might be accompanied by a specification of the vital matters concerning which no change should be made in the existing rules without a previous reference to the Government of India. The rules already allow a certain latitude to the local authorities even in essential matters (*e.g.*, within prescribed limits the Local Government may vary the wage scale, and the Collector the standard task and the price basis for the calculation of wages) and these provisions should, of course, be maintained.

A. R. TUCKER.





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I submit a short but useful note on Famine Relief which has been prepared by Mr. Tucker and accepted by my Committee.

Paragraphs 1-6 contain a summary of existing facts for the Royal Commission, while (if the Revenue and Agriculture Department approve) I will put the recommendation in paragraph 7 before the Commission in due course.

W. S. MEYER,—18-10-07.

Revenue and Agriculture Department.

Mr. Tucker's note is submitted for information.

I do not think that we need object to the suggestion in paragraph 7 being referred to the Royal Commission, though as a matter of fact, Local Governments do make alterations in unessential matters in their codes without reference to us.

(See in B Collection Pros. flagged L, H, and F.)

C. A. INNES,—25-10-07.

I am not sure that a hard and fast rule as to what Local Governments would alter and what they could not, would not give more trouble than the present practice under which Local Governments make minor alterations in the Codes and merely send in the correction slips for information, in order that we may keep our copies of the Codes up to date. If any rule is to be framed, it should I think be general in character, allowing Local Governments to make alterations in detail not affecting principles laid down by the Government of India.

J. H. KERR,—26-10-07.

Secretary, Decentralization Committee.

I fancy it will be difficult to frame, but I quite agree that minor alterations shall be made by Local Governments themselves.

J. O. M[ILLER],—26-10-07.



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